DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 055 CS 505 532

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TITLE "Let Us Entertain You": Service Programs for Individual Events.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (72nd, Chicago, IL, November 13-16, 1986).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiences; *Community Involvement; Debate; Educational Planning; Higher Education; *Instructional Innovation; Interaction; Motivation; *Persuasive Discourse; Program Content; *Program Development; Program Effectiveness; Program Improvement; Publicity; Public Speaking; *School Community Relationship; *Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS Coaching; *Individual Events (Forensics)

ABSTRACT

Although student interest is greater than ever, college forensics programs are limited in their expansion by budget considerations that restrict travel. However, with reasonable effort and perseverance new programs can be initiated or existing ones expanded to integrate the educational community and the community at large into a forensics program. A three-pronged approach is effective with the educational community: (1) offer the services directly to departments on campus, using campus-wide mailings or targeting specific professors; (2) contact both student and faculty/administration organizations; and (3) develop awareness of the program through campus-wide "showcases," such as demonstration debates or public speaking seminars. Such an approach will allow students to perform before a different audience than any they will confront during a regular competition. In the community at large, the groups most likely to be interested in program services are area schools, service clubs, and political organizations. It is crucial that debate participants be thoroughly prepared before representing the program to the public. The major advantage to the students involved in community/campus forensics is that they have the opportunity to speak before different audiences, advancing their skills interpretation and adaptation and building their self-confidence. (Appendices include examples of mailings to prospects.) (NKA)

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'Let Us Entertain You': Service Programs for Individual Events

by

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More and more forensic coaches are looking for new and innovative approaches in their programs. Restricted budgets limit travel even though for many programs, the interest level of students is higher than ever before. This paper advances an alternative to robbing a bank or wooing a wealthy benefactor (although either alternative may be more fun) which will allow you to expand an already existing program or begin a new one. The alternative is to develop a community-based program which can work alone or in conjuction with a traditional program.

The first decision you need to make is how much effort you want to put into this endeavor. It typically takes a reasonable amount of effort to get the program going and at times the going is slow, but perseverance pays off. Once the program is established, it tends to run on its own momentum.

Time is a precious commodity for most forensic coaches, so the approach advanced in this paper is one which will take a minimum of time and effort on your part. It can be elaborated upon at your discretion. Time is an important factor because it will determine whether you simply export the work your students are doing for competition directly into the community or if you are willing to adapt and develop programs to meet community needs. Make these options (or lack of them) clear to your contact people at the outset. If you offer them the option of choosing the topic, make certain that you specify in writing the amount of preparation time you need prior to the presentation date. Last minute requests will still arise, but if you set your policy and stick to it, you won't have a problem.

Initially, I will describe 'communities' you may wish to approach (and how to find them), how to integrate a community program into your traditional program, and some benefits of a community-based program. There are two primary 'communities' that you may attempt to reach. The first is the educational community at your college/university. The second is the community at large.

The approach to the educational community is the easiest. I recommend a three-pronged effort. The first is to offer your services directly to departments on campus. The best place to begin is with the campus directory and a course catalog. The directory will give you access to specific individuals and the course catalog will give you information on course offerings to which your services may apply. There are two ways to approach this audience. The first is a general, blanket campus mailing to all department chairs indicating that you are available to give presentations in classes (for a sample letter, see Appendix A). The second approach involves targeting specific instructors of specific courses (see Appendix B). In all cases, you must follow up with likely prospects especially in the early stages of developing your program.

The second audience you want to contact contains campus organizations, from student organizations such as the Young Republicans and Young Democrats to faculty and administration organizations like the faculty club. Often your student services office can give you a list of student organizations. The faculty senate may be able to give you contact people for

faculty organizations.

The third approach is designed to develop awareness of your program campus-wide through 'showcases'. These programs offer you an opportunity to showcase the talent in your program to the entire campus population. They can include demonstration debates, interpretive reading programs, public speaking seminars of comprehensive reviews including a combination of program types. I recommend at least one showcase per year - typically around nationals. This will allow you to make the campus community aware of any students who may be representing the school in national competition or, if you do not compete on the national level, the talent that has developed on the team throughout the course of the year. Be sure to send individual invitations to all community supporters, parents, and all administration members. Encourage your students to bring friends to the performance. Advertising your showcase in your department's classes and on the campus radios or in the newspaper will help get the word out. This is an important step in developing visibility for your program and it offers your students the opportunity to perform before a different audience than any they will see in competition.

This may be enough of a foundation on which to base your program or you may wish to address the 'community at large' as well. Often, these are the most rewarding contacts. There are four primary groups that you may wish to reach in the community at large. They include area schools, service clubs, social service organizations, and political organizations.

Area schools are typically highly responsive to a direct approach (modify letters in Appendices A & B). Speech, English, and social science teachers (civics and history) are all good prospects.

Service clubs and social service organizations are often the most receptive. They typically have regularly scheduled meetings which often include entertaining or informative presentations. The easiest way to find these organizations is to contact the local Chamber of Commerce. Most update a list of such agencies annually. The biggest problem you have here is that some organizations schedule their meetings and entertainment at the beginning of the calendar year, whereas school begins in the middle of the calendar year. This simply means that you will need to follow up on your initial contact. In some ways, this discrepancy is an advantage because it allows your students to prepare thoroughly before 'meeting the public'.

Political organizations like the League of Women Voters are often interested in sponsoring a debate on current issues and topics of interest. Issue debates around elections are particularly popular.

Now that we know who to approach and how, the question becomes how do we, as coaches, mobilize our resources to meet the demand? There are a number of options available here. For hard core forensicators, any audience is a good audience and they will be ready and willing to go. In fact, they may make it hard for you to integrate newer students into a community effort. If your students are not so zealous, however, there are

other options. You may make participation in one non-competitive speaking situation per quarter/semester/year a requirement for team membership. You may use the community program as a training ground for new students or as a reward for experienced students. On the other hand, you may integrate the community-based program into your classes as extra credit or a class assignment. It is crucial that, however you choose your participants, they be thoroughly prepared before they represent your program to the public.

There are numerous advantages to a community-based program both for the students involved and for the program as a whole. The major advantage to the students involved is that they have the opportunity to speak before different audiences, advancing their skills in audience interpretation and adaptation. This often builds their security and self-confidence. It also offers them an avenue for testing out new materials. Community audiences are typically much more positive and accepting than judges in competition.

Your program as a whole will also benefit. Community programs heighten your visibility; they let people know who you are and what your program is about. It is good public relations for your program and for the school in general. It also allows you to diversify your program so that you can be evaluated on more than simply the number of trophies you win annually. If you integrate both an educational/campus orientation and a community at large program, you maximize your potential contacts.

The primary decisions you have to make concern how to structure your program once you have decided to start one. Do you want to appeal only to the campus community? the community at large? both? How many performances do you want to do in a quarter/semester/year? When can you fit community programs into your regular schedule? How will students be involved? through class? as a team requirement? on a volunteer basis? How will you integrate new members into the program? Will you offer pre-planned programs of will you develop programs to meet community needs? From my experiences, these programs start out slowly and it takes them time to gain momentum. The first year I did one, I scheduled and executed only five programs. The following year, I had over ten requests the first semester.

Appendix A

To: Dr. John Schwartz, Chair, Political Science Department
From: Dr. Deborah Ballard-Reisch, Director of Forensics,
RE: Campus Debates and Public Speaking Presentations

Are you looking for an innovative teaching technique for your current issues or politics courses? Have you considered that one of the best ways to present both sides of an issue is through the debate format? Would you be interested in using demonstration debates in your department offerings? Would you rather have short presentations on a variety of issues? If so, the award winning Westfield University debate and forensics team is prepared to design a program to meet your needs. We request six weeks notice to prepare for and research the topic you desire.

If we can be of service, please call me at (702) 784-6839 or (702) 784-6541.

Appendix B

To: All Faculty Members
From: Dr. Deborah Ballard-Reisch, Director of Forensics,
_____ University
RE: Public Speaking, Interpretation and Debate Programs

Are you looking for an innovative teaching technique for your courses? Whether it be English Literature, Current Issues in Politics, Introduction to Economics, or whatever, the Westfield University speech and debate team is ready and willing to perform for you. We have presentations on informative topics of interest, persuasive speeches on current issues, interpretive readings of literature, and debates on current events topics. We have a number of programs ready to go. If you need a specific topic, we request a minimum of four weeks notice to prepare for your class.

If we can be of service, please let me know at (702) 784-6839 or (702) 784-6541.

Appendix C

To: Fred Schwartz, Program Chairman, Westfield Jaycees
From: Dr. Deborah Ballard-Reisch, Director of Forensics,
_____ University
RE: Public Speaking, Interpretation and Debate Programs

Are you looking for a program for your organization that is both entertaining and informative? Then I have the answer for you. The award winning (school name goes here) forensic team is ready and willing to perform for you. We have presentations on informative topics of interest which you have a 'need to know' or which are simply 'neat to know'; persuasive speeches on current issues; interpretive readings of literature, debates on current events topics.

If we can be of service, please let me know at (702) 784-6839 or (702) 784-6541.

Appendix D

Mr. John Schwartz
1122 Sunnybrook Ln.
Westfield, NV. 85768

Dear Mr. Schwartz:

I understand that you are program coordinator for the Westfield Jaycees. Coordinating the entertainment for an organization can be a burdensome task. I am writing to you in order to acquaint you with an answer to your dilemma of which you may not be aware. The award winning Westfield University forensics team is available to do informative or persuasive programs for you in either a debate or public speaking format.

We will prepare a program for you or we will design one around a topic of your choice. The first option can be available with two weeks notice, the second with six weeks notice. (You may want to include a list of topics available.)

If you have any questions, or I can be of service to you, please feel free to call me at (702) 784-6839 or (702) 784-6541.

Sincerely,

Dr. Deborah Ballard-Reisch
Director of Forensics
Westfield University
Westfield, NV 85768